

dancing with the peacock



STORY EVOLVED BY VENUS UPADHAYAYA
WITH THE 8TH GRADERS OF GOVT HIGH SCHOOL,
HEGGANAHALLI, BANGALORE IN JUNE 2013



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credits

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on values of inclusiveness

preface

Inclusiveness is a value and it needs to be cultivated in children. This book more than being a story for children is an exercise to explore how children naturally perceive and live with the values of inclusiveness.

SAMA Foundation, the publisher of this book is an NGO that works with children with disability. It works for an inclusive society and one of its programs is bridge learning centres that run in the premises of general public schools. Running a bridge learning centre for children with disability in the campus of general schools helps not to seclude children with disability in special schools and helps them to grow in a more inclusive setting. When in certain cases of disability the child becomes sufficiently skilled to study with general children, he/she is admitted to the general school.

I was given 45 minutes (subject period of a teacher on leave that day) with these 50-60 boys and girls of 8th grade of Government High School, Heganahalli, and Bangalore. It was difficult talking to this noisy group of 13 year olds. Boys were sitting on benches to my right and girls to my left.

I started to draw on the board and the story started to unfold. Children chose four characters and not surprisingly all of them were 13 years old and all of them had Kannada names. These kids didn't show any fancy for English or cinematic names.

The characters reflected these children, the two boys and two girls – boys playing only with boys and girls only with girls. The visually impaired girl in the story naturally got blended into the story without the children ever thinking of dropping her back in the village because of blindness. At no moment the group considered her a burden or treated her with contempt or special behaviour. The group helped her where she needed their help and left her on her own as and when it had to be.

We need to specifically draw our attention to it because this is not how most of the teachers treat a child with disability in a general school in our context. Many consider the child with disability a burden and there have been incidents where the school has refused to admit the child because of his/her disability or has demanded that parents be present throughout the school hours.

In contrast the thoughts children reflected during the story weaving exercise indicated that many children are endowed with the values of inclusiveness and parents and teachers have to help children cultivate them better. When the story ended, I asked everyone a question, "What are the children planning to do next?"

Most of the boys and the girls replied, "They want to climb higher mountain."

At this point, the girls and the boys started to differ. The girls said, "Yasodha is blind, how can she climb the higher mountain?"

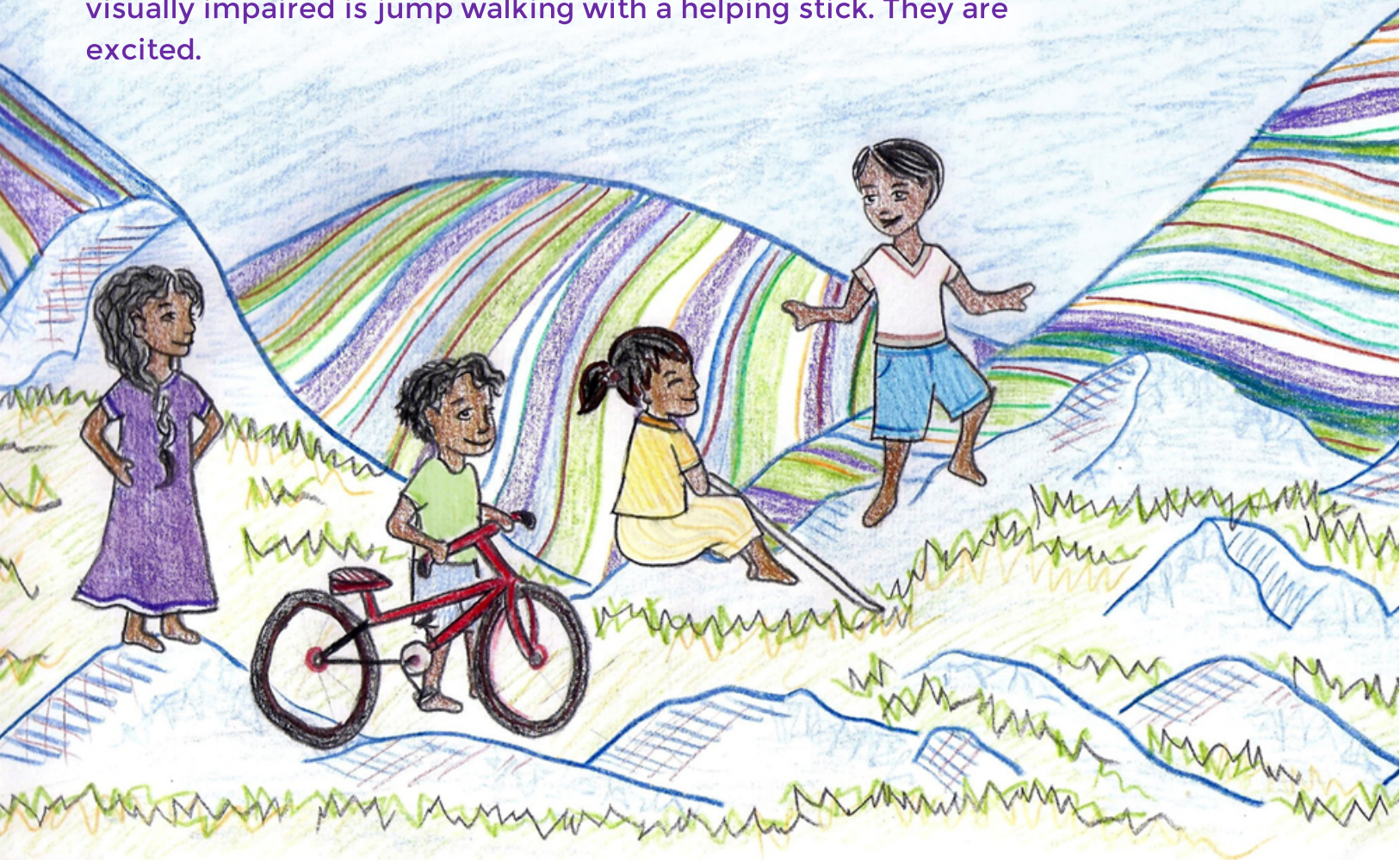
"Chandana and Yashoda will stay back and boys will climb ahead," girls said. Boys became very noisy and aggressive and said, "No, no they will also come."

Girls said, "How can that be possible? Yashoda is blind. Chandana will stay back with her." Most of the boys mocked at the girls and few boys said, "If she can climb a shorter mountain, she can climb the higher one too."

We have lots to learn from children; children know better how to live amidst diverse abilities with values of inclusiveness and compassion.

Venus Upadhayaya

Chandana, Yashoda, Venkatesh and Sheernappa are on their way to the hills. Venkatesh is riding a bicycle, Sheernappa is running along to keep pace. Chandana is jump walking and Yashoda, visually impaired is jump walking with a helping stick. They are excited.

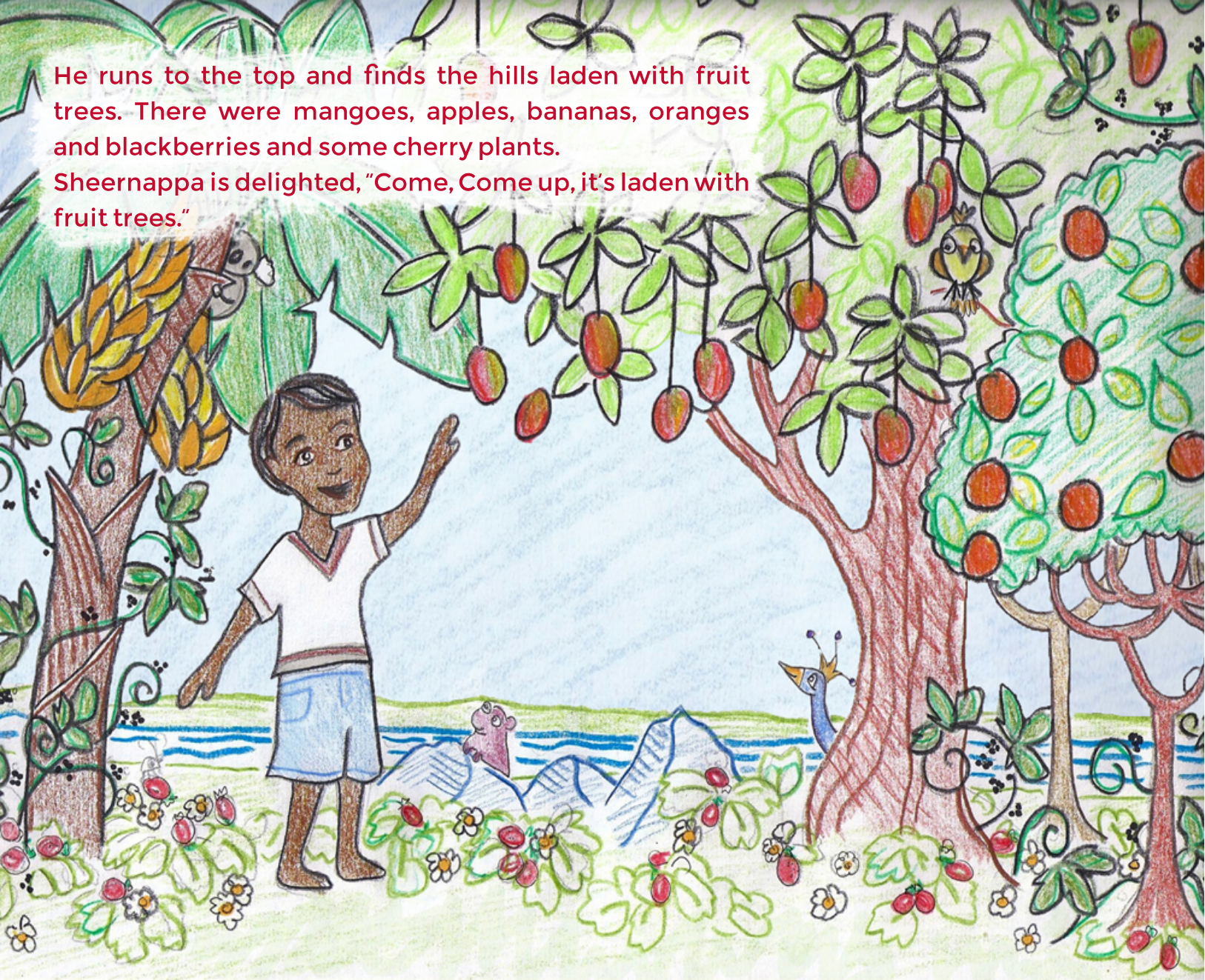


At the hill base while the children are resting, Sheernappa says, "I'll go up and check. Wait here till I call you"



He runs to the top and finds the hills laden with fruit trees. There were mangoes, apples, bananas, oranges and blackberries and some cherry plants.

Sheernappa is delighted, "Come, Come up, it's laden with fruit trees."



Everyone downhill becomes delighted. Venkatesh starts to race his cycle in excitement and crashes. Luckily he escapes unhurt. Everyone rushes to help him. Chandana says, "Let's leave your cycle here and climb by foot."

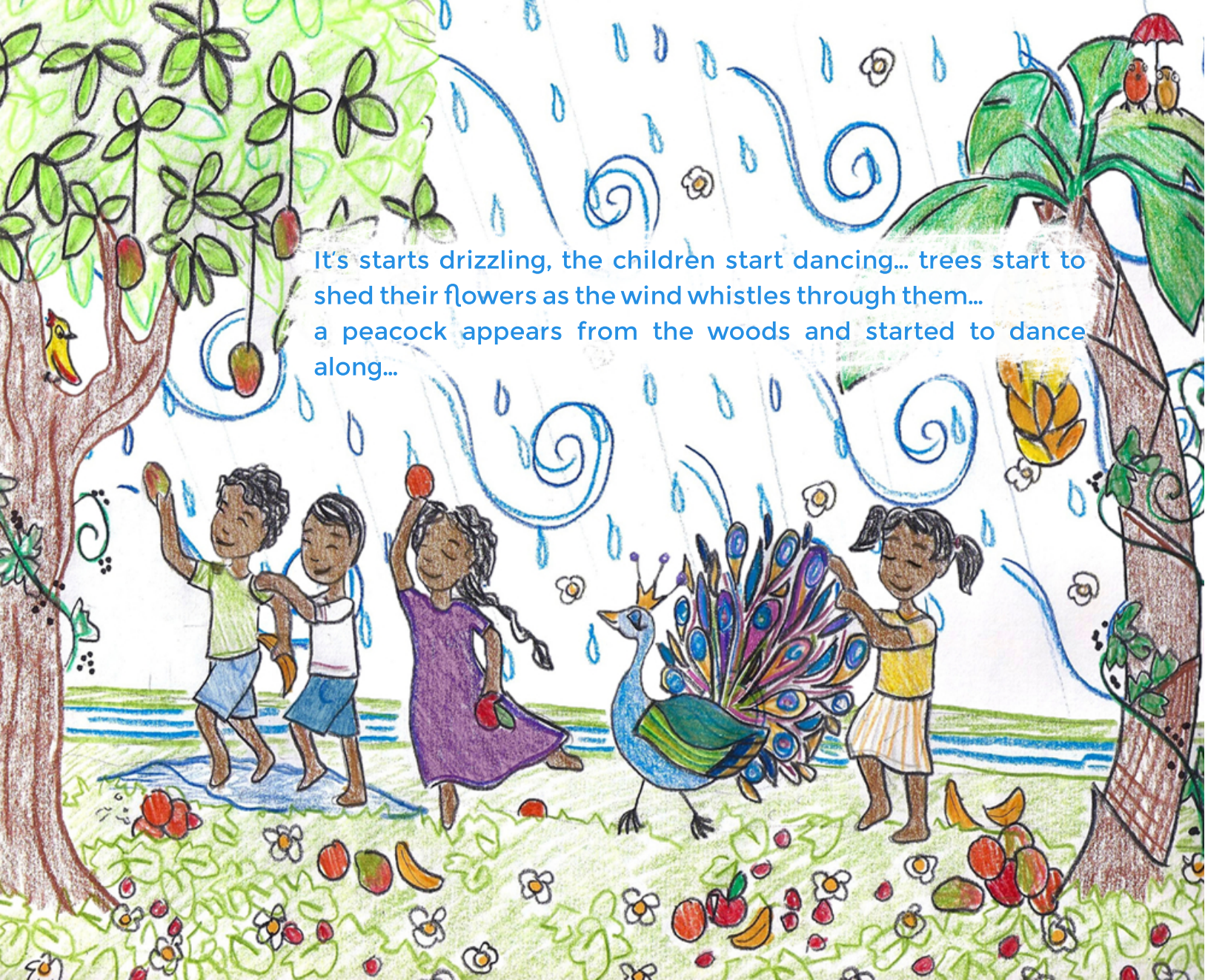


Uphill everyone is delighted. Mango trees are laden with ripe mangoes, oranges are fragrant and blackberries are strewn on the earth below. Venkatesh is excited to see the red ripe strawberries and Chandana's mouth is watering looking at the fresh apples.





In no time everyone is enjoying fruits to their heartful. Yashoda is humming while eating a sweet mango... "O sweet birds sing aloud for I can see through you... in your sound lies the sweetness of this nature... I can see through you... it's fragrance abound... it's fragrance abound... Oh sweet birds, come forth... I can see through you..."



It's starts drizzling, the children start dancing... trees start to shed their flowers as the wind whistles through them... a peacock appears from the woods and started to dance along...



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